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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000477

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: SPEAKER PELOSI MEETS WITH MP SAAD HARIRI

Classified By: Charge Christopher Murray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Saad Hariri told CODEL Pelosi that progress in the region, and particularly in Lebanon, requires that the international community take a firm and united stand on Syria and Iran. The Syrian regime only understands force, and is becoming emboldened by the increased number of visitors to Syria. The Arab Summit's resurrection of its 2002 peace plan is now distinguished by pan-Islamic support beyond the Arab world, including support from Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia. For all Arab countries, Hariri said, the Iranian nuclear program is a definite "no." Speaker Pelosi assured Hariri that she and her delegation would take a firm stance with the Syrians against terrorism. "All roads lead to Damascus," she said, and the Syrians must end their support for Hizballah, Hamas, and other terrorist groups. End Summary.

SYRIA RESPONDS ONLY TO SHOWS OF FORCE

¶2. (C) Saad Hariri, Member of Parliament and leader of the Mustaqbal party, met for over an hour on April 2 with CODEL Pelosi. The CODEL was led by Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi (CA); and comprised Representatives Tom Lantos (CA), Henry Waxman (CA), Nick Rahall (WV), David Hobson (OH), Louise Slaughter (NY), Keith Ellison (MN). The Charge and Econoff (notetaker) accompanied the CODEL.

¶3. (C) Hariri went to great lengths to warn the group against allowing the Syrian regime to believe that the USG stance towards Syria has softened in any way. Hariri said that "somewhere in the Syrian regime they feel emboldened," and that Syrian opposition to a democratic Lebanon goes beyond simple opposition to the Special Tribunal. He believed that Syria feels threatened by "actual democracy." Every time that the Siniora government has, with Hariri's full support, approached Syria about engagement, the Lebanese offers have been rebuffed. The assassinations, which he blames squarely on Syria, have not stopped. With the Tribunal approaching, Prime Minister Siniora will face more difficult times.

¶4. (C) Hariri pointed out that Syria's Bashar al-Asad and Jordan's King Abdullah had assumed power from their fathers at the same time. Both had all doors open to them. Asad chose Iran and "shut the doors." Pressing his point

repeatedly, Hariri said that Syria would not give in on any issues unless the entire world sided against them, as it did after the Cedar Revolution. He said that as a practical matter, the issue of the Special Tribunal is in the hands of Syria and Iran, not in the hands of Lebanese politicians. The majority MPs would like to convene parliament and vote on the Tribunal, and would have a clear majority, but will not be able to do so because of "orders from Syria." The unspoken point was that President of the Parliament Nabih Berri refuses to convene the Parliament on orders from Syria; there is little the majority-led Cabinet can do to force his hand. Hariri urged the CODEL to ask Berri why he will not convene the Parliament. Hariri pointed out that Syria has gone as far as saying that it would not accept anything but a blocking third for the opposition in any new Lebanese government, a clear indication of Syrian unwillingness to accept Lebanese sovereignty. For these reasons, only a firm and united stand against Syria will be effective.

15. (C) In a pointed message to the CODEL, Hariri pointed out that so many delegations -- U.S. and others -- have gone to Syria recently that Damascus sees these visits as a weakness and has become bolder. In the past, Syria was warned to leave former PM Hariri alone, and it did not do so. Warned not to extend President Lahoud's mandate, it did so anyway. Syria will always do what it wants; the only two notable exceptions were after the Cedar Revolution, when it was forced to withdraw from Lebanon, and when the Turkish government massed troops at the border and demanded the turnover of PKK terrorist leader Abdallah Ocalan. With the Turkish soldiers visible from Syrian territory, Syria caved in well before Turkey's forty-eight hour deadline. Hariri emphasized repeatedly that Syria only responds to a show of strength, and not to warnings. Hariri asked rhetorically, if the USG is willing to engage with Syria, a regime which

BEIRUT 00000477 002 OF 002

supports terrorism, then why not with Hamas, Hizballah or al-Qaeda?

16. (C) Speaker Pelosi firmly rebutted any hint that the CODEL was less than wary about Syria, its intentions, and its tactics. She stressed that the CODEL was traveling to Damascus to hold the Syrian regime accountable for its actions. "All roads lead to Damascus," she said, in reference to support for Hizballah, Hamas, and other terrorist groups. In a later question from Hariri about the Syria Accountability Act, Representative Lantos replied that even tougher measures were now under serious consideration in the Congress.

SAUDI PEACE PROPOSAL

17. (C) Hariri indicated that he did not foresee negotiations between Saudi Arabia and Israel any time soon, despite the offer which came from the Saudis out of the Arab Summit. However, he said that Syria was "ready for peace with Israel tomorrow if the (Syrian) regime would be safe." He also believes that Israel views Syria as a "good neighbor," given the 30 year absence of any Syrian attacks against the occupied Golan Heights. Hariri, however, felt that the most important factor of this past month's Arab Summit proposal was that it has now become pan-Islamic, rather than solely an Arab initiative. Calling this a huge breakthrough, Hariri said this means that anyone who would fight with Israel, without Arab agreement, would henceforth be breaking any peace that is brokered on the basis of the Arab Summit proposal. Hariri, while pointing out that the USG could assist in bringing Israel and Saudi Arabia together, advocated that the U.S. stand aside while Egypt and Saudi Arabia attempt to bring Hamas to the table, and pull it away from Iranian influence.

NEXT STEPS IN POLITICAL CRISIS

¶18. (C) Hariri seemed convinced that the GOL and the security forces are making progress in the fight against extremists in Lebanon, especially those coming from Syria and Iran to infiltrate Palestinian organizations. He also defended the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), saying that it has done a "pretty good job" and can't be expected to "do magic." He called it the "army of the people," and said that it should not be mired in the political crisis. The LAF needs to be emboldened and armed, which is happening, thanks to the Saudis and the UAE, who are financing improvements for the LAF and the Internal Security Forces. Reconstruction efforts, which will "never be enough," are open to criticism because the damage was limited to Shiite homes, and Hizballah has done a good job marketing its own efforts in reconstruction. Nevertheless Shia criticism of Hizballah efforts has been growing and should be encouraged.

¶19. (C) In response to a question on the degree of continued Syrian intelligence infiltration in Lebanon, Hariri replied that of the 200-300,000 Syrian workers in Lebanon, from five to ten percent could be expected to be working for Syrian intelligence.

¶10. (C) Returning to the theme of pan-Islamic support for the Lebanese majority, Hariri likened the current situation to the "last 100 meters of a race" with the Lebanese opposition. The majority is in a much better position because of Islamic and Arab support. He indicated that majority MPs would be going again to the Parliament tomorrow to attempt to get Speaker Berri to open a new session and move ahead on legislation. He said "tomorrow is an important day," but he gave no indication that he believed it would be a successful day.

¶11. (U) CODEL Pelosi departed post prior to clearing this message.
MURRAY